

MARK TWAIN

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CONTEMPORARIES

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Mark Twain

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Apr. 1940

Mark Twain, Writer

WHEN Edward Bok, great reformer, publisher and collector, requested Mark Twain's autograph, he received this reply. A rare example of Twain's merciless wit, yet because the whole letter including signature was typewritten, its value as a collector's item was greatly reduced.

Dear Sir:

I hope I shall not offend you; I shall certainly say nothing with the intention to offend you. I must explain myself, however, and I will do it as kindly as I can. What you ask me to do, I am asked to do as often as one-half dozen times a week. Three hundred letters a year! One's impulse is to freely consent, but one's time and necessary occupations will not permit it. There is no way but to decline in all cases, making no exceptions, and I wish to call your attention to a thing which has probably not occurred to you, and that is this: that no man takes pleasure in exercising his trade as a pastime. Writing is my trade, and I exercise it only when I am obliged to. You might make your request of a doctor, or a builder, or a sculptor, and there would be no impropriety in it, but if you asked either of those for a specimen of his trade, his handiwork, he would be justified in rising to a point of order. It would never be fair to ask a doctor for one of his corpses to remember him by.

MARK TWAIN



Tribune BOOKS

Chicago Tribune ■ SUNDAY, MAY 12, 1996 ■ SECTION 14

The return of Huck Finn

A restored version puts Twain's
classic in the spotlight again

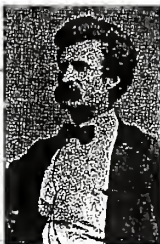
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

By Mark Twain.
Introduction by Justin Kaplan; foreword and
addendum by Victor Doyno.
Random House, 418 pages, \$25

Reviewed by James A. McPherson
A teacher at the University of Iowa Writers
Workshop and author of the Pulitzer Prize-
winning story collection "Elbow Room"

This new edition of Mark Twain's classic restores the four sections Twain cut from the version of "Huckleberry Finn" published in England in 1884 and America in 1885. The masterly restoration by Justin Kaplan and Victor Doyno will be extremely useful not just to Twain scholars but to serious readers who want to see how a great novel can be cut and edited without losing its moral core. And the general reader might find it constructive to study the mysterious ways in which sections of great books (and films), once edited and discarded, are now being recovered to guide the reader deeper into an artist's real intention.

In the case of "Huckleberry Finn," the 665 manuscript pages Twain rejected have had an interesting underground life. In 1885, the author gave the first half of his working manuscript, including the discarded sections of the just-published novel, to James Fraser Gluck, a lawyer and civic leader in Buffalo, N.Y.



Mark Twain

Gluck had solicited it for the collection of the Buffalo and Erie County Library, which already owned the second half of Twain's manuscript.

But the pages were never delivered to the library. Gluck died in 1897, and the manuscript was stored in a trunk until 1990, when Gluck's granddaughter, then living in California, found it. She and her sister sent the manuscript to Sotheby's auction house for public sale. But the news about its reappearance became public in 1991, and soon a complex legal case developed.

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library claimed ownership of the pages as something like an "overdue book," according to Kaplan's introduction to this restored edition; Gluck's descendants claimed them by rights of inheritance; and the Mark Twain Foundation staked its claim as the trustee of all his property. After 17 months of litigation, a settlement was reached. Random House agreed to publish this special comprehensive edition of the novel, giving all three parties in the litigation proceeds from its earnings.

The restored novel has now arrived, with great fanfare. I wish this new version of "Huckleberry Finn" would be distributed to all the nation's classrooms as the basic text and lead to a badly-needed reconsideration of the questions it raises.

Huck Finn
Reported by
Mark Twain

Chap. 1.

*You do not know
about me, without you have
read a book by the name
of "The Adventures of Tom
Sawyer." That book was
made by Mr. Mark Twain
& he tells the truth, mainly.
There was things which he
stretched, but mainly he
tells the truth. That is
ing. I never seen*



The first manuscript page
and an original illustration for
"Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,"
both reproduced in the restored version

One wants to imagine that, someplace, Mark Twain (who advised that those readers "attempting to find a meaning in it will be banished") is laughing at the shifty way this contest has placed his novel at the center of public attention again, 111 years after he cautioned against such flapdoodle.

In a strictly sober view, nothing has been added to the novel that diminishes its claim to greatness. The first new section, in Chapter 9, is a story told to

Huck by Jim, in dialect, about the way a cadaver came alive in a dissecting room and attacked him. This passage confirms that, in Twain's initial conception, Jim was more or less a minstrel figure, a Mr. Bones to Huck's Mr. Tambourine.

The reader will see a similar exchange between a straight man and an interlocutor in Chapter 8. In these two chapters, Twain is still struggling with his

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Twain

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

love of the minstrel tradition and of the growing necessity of Jim to the moral dimensions of his story.

The second additional section of the novel is the "Raftsmen's Passage," which at one time was apparently part of the very important 16th chapter, when Huck first wrestles with his conscience over the "moral" necessity to turn Jim over to the slave catchers. This restored section is probably the best part of the new book because it explores Huck in a more complex way.

It should be noted that Twain added a far more restrained version of this same material to his "Life on the Mississippi." But here Huck confronts a company of raftsmen who display all the rough, homespun "manners" of the "Ring-Tailed Roarer" of backwoods fame.

Huck's encounter with the belligerent raftsmen adds a kind of background for the moral dilemma with which he wrestles in this chapter. He listens from hiding as a raftsmen tells a story about the resurrection of a baby, killed by its father, from a barrel floating in the river. Afterward, the raftsmen discover Huck and

threaten to kill him. But they show compassion and allow Huck to leave.

It is in this chapter, when he returns to Jim waiting on the raft, that Huck battles his conscience over Jim. Raised in a white-supremacist society, Huck nevertheless "saves" Jim from the slave catchers, but, as the new additions show, in doing so he affirms supremacist norms by telling them Jim is white. It is interesting to read Twain's first draft of Huck's cynical resolution of the dilemma:

"From this out I mean to do everything as wrong as I can do it, and just go straight to the dogs and done with it. I don't see why people's put here, anyway..."

This is not only cynical but ironic in the way Huck has come to equate what is morally right with what is conventionally wrong.

The final restored sections of the novel have to do with religion. In one, at the revival meeting in Pokeville, Twain describes the religious hypocrisy of the revivalists. They are willing to give money, and even kisses, to the King, the confidence man Huck has met on his journey, who is masquerading as a Barbary pirate who has been converted. But the revivalists, like all moral dandies, who relish the affectation of a moral style over substance, shun the

black woman who would share their religious enthusiasm.

The second restored religious section involves the King's coming back to the raft and expressing to Huck his expertise in "missionary" moral dandies such as the ones in Pokeville: "It warn't no use talking, heathens didn't amount to a dern, alongside of pirates, to work a camp meeting with..."

Those who practice contemporary forms of political correctness will probably have a hard time with this restored version of "Huckleberry Finn." Even without its edited passages, it was called, when published in 1885, "trash and suitable only for the slums" and "of a very low grade of morality." This was the outraged voice of the cult of gentility of Twain's day.

The editors of this edition seem to anticipate renewed moral outcry. Kaplan notes there were 215 references to "niggers" in the old version, and the restored sections will raise that number. Yet, as Kaplan reminds us in his introduction, this epithet "has more pre-emptive force today than it had in Mark Twain's day." His assessment is reinforced by the "shock" on the parts of people repulsed, at least publicly, by the recorded language of Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman in the O.J. Simpson case. And yet it is a reality to be considered.

Twain would have known that in the frontier areas those whites who were below or outside the hierarchy of social mobility sometimes called themselves "niggers" in a self-affirming way. In Twain's day the word sometimes had complex implications, but he always saw the archetypal human experience that hid behind the stereotype.

Recently, novelist Jane Smiley offered "second thoughts" about Twain's masterpiece. In "Say It Ain't So, Huck," in the January issue of Harper's, she said "Huckleberry Finn" has little in the way of greatness. There is more to be learned about the American character, she said, "from its canonization than through its canonization."

Smiley sees the novel as faultily written and morally unsound, with its place in the national pantheon secured by several generations of white, Protestant, middle-class critics. She writes: "For all his lip service to real attachment between white boy and black man, Twain really saw Jim as no more than Huck's sidekick, homoerotic or otherwise. All the claims that are routinely made for the book's humanitarian powers are, in the end, absurd."

Smiley makes the case for Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as deserving of canonization, and as a much better novel than "Huckleberry Finn" because of its clear-eyed look at racism.

Responding to Smiley in The New York Times, Kaplan said Twain had not intended his novel to be an indictment of slavery, as Stowe had intended hers to be. "Huckleberry Finn" was not a cry for action, Kaplan said. It was Twain's "troubled

adult recognition that the same white riverine society that allowed his brief rafting idyll was also heartless and greedy, a league of swindlers, drunks, hypocrites, bounty hunters and trigger-happy psychopaths." In dismissing "Huck," Kaplan concluded, Smiley had "[sold] stylistic innovation, humor and imaginative literature down the river."

I agree with Smiley that most white Americans think that "racism is a feeling... [and] almost invariably fail to understand that how they feel means very little to black Americans, who understand racism as a way of structuring American culture, American politics, and the American economy."

But Smiley is indicting Twain, who looked back on slavery from the post-Civil War perspective of the 1870s and 1880s, with an understanding that even now, in the mid-1990s, is only rarely comprehended. Twain was writing about the possibility of friendship across racial lines, at a time when such emotional connections were considered radical. He was writing about the struggles of the human heart confined to the structure of white supremacy that Smiley perceives. And, yet Twain, like Stephen Crane after him, still wrestled with the possibilities of heroic action within the confines of a corrupt, uncaring culture.

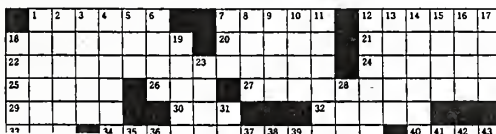
This issue, like that of racism, is still current in American life. Twain was mature enough to know that there are no easy answers to either issue. Insofar as he practiced a basic pessimism of the mind concurrent with an ironic, humorous optimism of the heart and the will, Mark Twain wrote what will remain an American classic.

Crossword

Give Ma the Day Off!

ACROSS

- 1 Skulls
7 His ma was Sarah
12 Swans
a-swimming,
for example
18 Life with



- 49 Attila's excuse?
50 Merchant
51 Bandleader
52 Betelgeuse,
for one
53 Half a rebuke
57 More tide island
59 Steamer's course
61 S of Eur.



